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ABSTRACT

Professionals who work with runaway, throwaway, and homeless youth have long known that many of these young people leave home to escape abusive and/or destructive family situations. This update presents the findings of a national study on such children. Results of the study, "Youth with Runaway, Throwaway, and Homeless Experiences: Prevalence, Drug Use, and Other At-Risk Behaviors," suggest that many so-called "runaways" are misnamed. More than half of the youth in street shelters or on the street reported that and adult caretaker either told them to leave or knew they were leaving and did not care. Researchers examined youth in shelters, street youth, youth placement in institutional settings, and youth in households. Data suggest that familial substance abuse, poverty, suicide, and difficulty meeting basic needs afflicted most of these young people. Other problems included victimization, delinquency, and unprotected sexual activity. Although these youth need help making a successful transition to adulthood, many of them do not have access to, or are not utilizing, such assistance, with the exception of health care services. Some of the recommendations made here include educating the public, substance abuse prevention and treatment, outreach and coordination of support services, prenatal care for pregnant teens, and greater access to transitional living program services. Some of the study's strengths and limitations are also discussed. (RJM)

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FYSB UPDATE

The Family and Youth Services Bureau

A FYSB Research Summary

October 1995

Youth With Runaway, Throwaway, and Homeless Experiences...

Prevalence, Drug Use, and Other At-Risk Behaviors

Professionals who work with runaway, throwaway, and homeless youth have long known that many of these young people leave home to escape abusive and/or destructive family situations or are told to leave by parents or caretakers. Once on the street, young people are at high risk of being physically and/or sexually victimized, of self-medicating with drugs or alcohol to reduce emotional pain, of attempting suicide, and of engaging in delinquent acts or "survival" sex to meet their needs for food, shelter, and clothing.

A recently released report on a study funded by the Family and Youth Services Bureau (FYSB), a Bureau within the Administration on Children, Youth and Families (ACYF), confirms many of these observations. The study found a strong link between family circumstances, especially familial substance use, and the high-risk behaviors of runaway, throwaway, and homeless young people, especially substance abuse and suicide. In turn, substance-abusing runaway, throwaway, and homeless young people were found to be more likely to experience threats to their well-being while on the

The study found a strong link between familial substance use and the high-risk behaviors of runaway, throwaway, and homeless youth.

About the Family and Youth Services Bureau

The mission of the Family and Youth Services Bureau (FYSB) is to provide national leadership on youth issues and to assist individuals and organizations in delivering effective, comprehensive services to youth in at-risk situations and their families. To that end, FYSB, a Bureau within the Administration on Children, Youth and Families (ACYF); Administration for Children and Families; Department of Health and Human Services, administers five major grant programs that support locally based youth services. FYSB also contributes resources to support ACYF evaluation studies that look at specific problems facing youth in at-risk circumstances and that assess the effects of FYSB programs.

For more information on FYSB, please call or write the National Clearinghouse on Families & Youth at P.O. Box 13505, Silver Spring, MD 20911-3505; (301) 608-8098.

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street, such as physical victimization and sexual exploitation.

The results of the study, *Youth With Runaway, Throwaway, and Homeless Experiences: Prevalence, Drug Use, and Other At-Risk Behaviors*, also suggest that the "runaway" label most commonly used to describe young people on the street may be misleading. About half of the young people surveyed in shelters and on the street reported that an adult caretaker either asked them to leave or did not care whether they left. "We found that a large portion of the young people usually referred to as 'runaways' also could be categorized as 'throwaways,'" said Chris Ringwalt of Research Triangle Institute (RTI), the study's project director.

Interviewers asked about young people's experiences before and after leaving home to determine how their risk behaviors changed.

Study Mandated by Congress

Concern about substance abuse among runaway, throwaway, and homeless youth and their families led Congress in 1988 to authorize research on its consequences. Through the Anti-Drug Abuse Act of 1988 (P.L. 100-690), Congress required research into the relationship between familial substance use, youth substance abuse, and suicide attempts among runaway and homeless youth. "This provision of the Act was designed to help programs serving this population to address substance use issues among youth and their families," said Terry Lewis, FYSB's Associate Commissioner.

Under that Congressional mandate, FYSB funded a research team that began working in 1990 to design and carry out the study. The study focused on four areas:

- The prevalence of substance abuse, suicide attempts, and other at-risk behaviors among runaway, throwaway, and homeless youth
- The relationship between substance abuse by these youth and substance abuse by their families, and between substance abuse by both groups and youth suicide attempts and other risk behaviors
- The proportion of these young people who have been exposed to drug prevention efforts and participated in drug treatment services, and this population's need for and access to health care services
- The total number of beds available to these young people in youth shelters and the proportion of beds occupied

"FYSB and ACYF staff worked closely with RTI in designing this important study," said Jim Griffin, Federal Project Officer for the study and a member of the ACYF Division of Program Evaluation. "We wanted to ensure that the study collected information that would enable FYSB to further refine its policy and program planning process."

The researchers employed a study design that would yield data on the issues outlined in the legislation. It included surveys of three populations of young people:

- **Youth in shelters:** The researchers conducted a nationally representative survey of 640 youth age 12–21 residing in both federally and nonfederally funded youth shelters. Youth were asked about their runaway and homeless experiences, factors related to their departure from home, and risk behaviors both before and after leaving home.
- **Street youth:** The researchers interviewed 600 street youth age 12–21 in 10 cities,

a purposive sampling. In most cities, local outreach workers helped researchers identify and recruit street youth for participation in the study. The questions used in this survey were almost identical to those used in the shelter survey, with a few questions omitted from the street survey. The street survey was intentionally designed to be briefer since interviews were conducted on the street, making indepth interviews more difficult.

- **Youth in households:** Through an interagency agreement between the ACYF and the National Center for Health Statistics (NCHS), the researchers added a series of questions concerning runaway experiences to the Youth Risk Behavior Supplement (YRBS) of the National Health Interview Survey (NHIS). The questions enabled the researchers to determine the extent of runaway experience among the 6,496 youth age 12–17 who responded to the survey. This survey was administered via audiocassette to youth in their homes.

The research team chose populations that could be relatively easily accessed within available resources while being as representative as possible of the total population of youth with runaway, throwaway, and homeless experiences. By including youth in the street sample, for example, they were able to collect information on young people who had been away from home for some time.

The researchers also conducted a mail survey of directors of a nationally representative sample of youth shelters, receiving responses from 160 directors. The survey asked questions regarding shelter capacity and occupancy and the ages of young people served by shelters.

The study found that disruptive family conditions may be the principal reason that young people leave home.

Researchers Identify Study Strengths and Limitations

The study is the first to include a nationally representative survey on substance use and other at-risk behaviors among runaway, throwaway, and homeless youth in federally and nonfederally funded shelters. As in any study, several minor limitations should be considered when reviewing the study's findings. The following are the most important of these:

- The shelter and household samples were nationally representative, while the street sample was not.
- The questions asked in the shelter and street surveys differed from those asked in the household survey. The researchers included broader questions in the household survey because no followup questions were possible since the survey was administered by audiocassette, not in person. In addition, questions included in the household survey were briefer since the space allotted for each question was limited.
- The household sample, obviously, did not include youth on the street or in institutions. By definition, youth who were runaways, throwaways, homeless, or in group homes or juvenile detention facilities at the time of the interview were excluded from the household sample.
- Analysis of the data from the household survey was limited to youth age 12–17, while the shelter and street analysis included youth age 12–21.

The study also had many strengths. Among these was the breadth and volume of the data gathered on youth within each study component. The study team collected information on the family backgrounds of youth, their risk behaviors, and the characteristics of their experiences on the street. In several sections of the shelter and street surveys, interviewers asked about young people's experiences both before and after leaving home, allowing a determination of the degree to which their risk behaviors changed after leaving home. Less than 1 percent of youth contacted through the shelter survey declined to participate; response rates for the street component could not be assessed.

The findings suggest that familial substance use co-occurs with youth substance abuse, youth suicide attempts, and other problem behaviors.

In addition, the household survey allowed data to be collected on the runaway experiences of a large, nationally representative sample of youth in the household population. This survey employed a rigorous sampling design, and substantial efforts were made to ensure confidentiality: the instrument was administered by audiocassette, with youth marking responses on answer sheets that contained question numbers and response options only. "We believe this process made youth more willing to respond honestly to potentially delicate questions," said Jody Greene, principal author of the final report on the study.

Findings Indicate That Runaway, Throwaway, and Homeless Youth Face Challenging Family Circumstances

The study found that disruptive family conditions may be the principal reason that runaway, throwaway, and homeless young people leave home. The study's findings paint a picture of difficult conditions in the homes of these youth that are linked to their departure.

Familial Substance Use. A total of 31 percent of youth in the shelter sample and 45 percent of those in the street sample reported substance use by a family member in the 30 days before the youth left home. About 19 percent of youth in the shelter sample reported substance use by their fathers during those 30 days, about 18 percent by their mothers, and about 27 percent by step-parents. For the street sample, the respective figures were 24 percent, 33 percent, and 35 percent.

The study suggests that familial substance use is associated with poor family functioning. Of youth in the shelter and street samples reporting familial substance use, the majority said that when family members used substances, they were more likely to have arguments with youth, to neglect or ignore them, or to hit them.

Data from the study also suggest that familial substance use adversely affects the behavioral functioning of youth. The results of the shelter survey showed a strong connection between substance use by families and youth's own substance abuse. Further, in both the shelter and street samples, youth from substance-using families were twice as likely to have attempted suicide. The presence of familial substance use also was associated with delinquency and weapon carrying by youth once they were on the street.

The findings suggest that familial substance use co-occurs with youth substance abuse, youth suicide attempts, and other behaviors that threaten young people's well-being. Although further research is needed on the direction of cause and effect

among these factors, the presence of familial substance use appears to increase the likelihood that young people will experience serious difficulties.

Poverty. About 40 percent of youth in both the shelter and street samples were from families that received public assistance or lived in publicly assisted housing. This figure compares with an estimate of about 22 percent of youth in the general population living in poverty found in a study conducted by the U.S. Census Bureau.

Youth Placement in Institutional Settings. A total of 58 percent of the shelter component and 71 percent of the street component had been placed or spent time in at least one of the five institutional settings the researchers specified (foster care, group home, psychiatric or mental hospital, juvenile detention, or jail).

Suicide. The study found that 26 percent of the shelter component and 32 percent of the street component had ever attempted suicide. The likelihood that youth would attempt suicide varied by key demographic characteristics, with suicide attempts more likely among older youth age 18–21 and females. Some 36 percent of youth in the shelter component who reported attempting suicide were hospitalized after their most recent attempt. The study also found that in both the shelter and the street component, the proportion of youth who reported attempting suicide at home was higher than the proportion who attempted suicide while away from home.

Throwaway Experiences. The study's findings indicate that many of these young people did not choose to leave home or that parental neglect played a role in their departure. More than half of the youth in the shelter and street samples reported that their parents either told them to leave or knew they were leaving but did not care. More specifically, about 47 percent of youth in both the shelter and street samples reported that their parents told them to leave. About 35 percent in the shelter sample and 41 percent in the street sample said that their parents knew they were leaving but did not care.

More than half of the youth in the shelter and street samples reported that their parents either told them to leave or knew they were leaving but did not care.

Young People Face Harsh Realities on the Street

The study found that once on the street, runaway, throwaway, and homeless youth had trouble meeting basic needs and faced a violent environment and other threats to their well-being. Their bleak circumstances appear to lead many of them to use substances as a way of escaping the pain of their situation.

Difficulty Meeting Basic Needs. One-third of the youth surveyed through the shelter sample and two-thirds of those surveyed through the street sample reported having problems meeting basic needs while away from home, such as for food, clothing, shelter, or medical care. Adolescence can be a challenging time even for young people growing up in stable, supportive environments. Many young people on the street, however, come from homes in which they have not been given support and encouragement, let alone been assisted in developing the life skills necessary to gradually move to independence. On the contrary, many have been physically, sexually, or emotionally abused and neglected.

"Once on the street, young people lack support and guidance on dealing with the negative feelings resulting from their family experiences and in obtaining and retaining a job,"

said Lewis. "With no source of income, many cannot obtain basic necessities like food, clothing, and shelter."

Substance Abuse. The household survey found that the likelihood of substance abuse was higher among youth with runaway experience than among youth without this experience. Youth with runaway experience, for example, were 6 times as likely as youth without such experience to have used marijuana and 35 times as likely to have used cocaine.

Youth in the shelter sample who used sedatives were six times as likely to have attempted suicide.

Youth in the shelter and street surveys also reported high rates of substance abuse both before and after leaving home. The results showed, however, that rates of substance abuse rose after youth left home. In the shelter component, for example, use of marijuana rose from about 24 percent in the 30 days before the young person left home to about 39 percent after leaving. Use of hallucinogens rose from 5 percent before leaving to 11 percent after leaving.

The researchers also found an association between youth substance abuse and suicidal behavior. Youth in the shelter sample who used sedatives, for example, were six times as likely as those who did not to have ever attempted suicide.

Further, substance abuse among these young people also appears to be a way of withstanding the severe hardships they face both at home and on the street. Researchers asked youth in the shelter and street samples who had either used substances since leaving home or had done so within the 30 days before leaving home about their reasons for doing so. The leading reasons they gave were to forget or to cope with their problems, especially family problems, and to stop feeling sad or depressed. "It appears that these young people are using drugs at least in part as an analgesic," said Ringwalt.

Victimization. The results of the shelter and street surveys also showed a generally strong relationship between youth substance use and the likelihood that the young person had been physically or sexually victimized while on the street. "Young people on the street are easily taken advantage of by adults," said Ringwalt. "Their substance abuse may make them even more vulnerable or may be a result of having been victimized."

On the street, youth also are vulnerable to other kinds of exploitation. The study showed that one-third of youth in the street sample had been robbed or assaulted or both, with about one-sixth of youth in the shelter sample reporting robbery or assault or both. "The findings paint a picture of a climate of violence on the street that puts these young people at risk of becoming the victims or the perpetrators of violence, or both," said Ringwalt.

Delinquency. In that context, the study's findings regarding youth involvement in delinquency are easier to understand. The study found, for example, that about one-half of the shelter sample and two-thirds of the street sample reported carrying a weapon. Two-thirds of the shelter sample and four-fifths of the street sample reported having attempted or committed a theft-related activity. About one-tenth of the shelter sample and one-fourth of the street sample reported committing a violent act involving a weapon.

"Such a finding would be expected among this population of young people, many of whom have been exposed to violence in a variety of settings

and are struggling to survive in a demanding environment," said Lewis. According to Lewis, many of these youth grow up in home environments in which parents have used violence against them or another family member. Some are driven to acts of violence to obtain money for food and shelter. They also may look for security and companionship by joining a gang, which puts them at high risk for violence and delinquency. Their vulnerability to exploitation by adults may make them more prone to resort to violence to protect themselves.

Ringwalt cautioned that further validation of these results is needed: "Some of these young people may have felt they needed to posture for interviewers on issues of violence to create the image of invulnerability so necessary to street survival. We need to further research the extent to which this is true and the contexts in which these young people commit acts of violence."

Unprotected Sexual Activity. Two-fifths of females in the shelter sample and one-half of females in the street sample reported having been pregnant at least once in their lives, and one-tenth in both samples were pregnant at the time of the interview. In the household sample, 13 percent of males with any runaway experience reported having gotten a female pregnant, compared with 2 percent of males without a runaway experience. These findings confirmed the higher incidence of pregnancy and the larger number of young mothers that FYSB-funded shelters have reported seeing for the last several years among the runaway, throwaway, and homeless youth population.

A high proportion of youth in the street sample reported contact with health service providers while on the street.

Data Show Some Underutilization of Critical Services

The conditions on the street make it unlikely that runaway, throwaway, and homeless young people will transition successfully to adulthood without support and service . The study found, however, that many of these young people do not have access to, or are not utilizing, such assistance, with the exception of health care services.

Substance Abuse Treatment. Relatively few of the young people surveyed through the shelter component (18 percent) and the street component (24 percent) had ever received treatment for substance abuse. The results of the shelter survey showed that youth from families who did not receive public aid were more likely to have received treatment. "These youth may have had greater access to treatment because their families had private health insurance," said Ringwalt.

Shelter Services. The research team also asked about young people's use of emergency youth shelters. The survey of shelter directors found that on any given night, 55 percent of shelter beds were occupied. "This occupancy rate is to be expected since use of shelters fluctuates by season and day of the week," said Ringwalt. In addition, the short-term nature of shelter services makes it essential that there be empty beds to ensure that space is always available. "Young people may stay in shelters for one night or for up to 2 weeks, depending upon when they can be reunified with their families or placed in appropriate alternative living situations," said Ringwalt. "Shelters must have enough beds to allow them to

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accommodate all young people during peak times."

The study also found that 56 percent of youth in the street sample had never used a youth shelter. In addition, 75 percent of the household sample who had runaway experience and had stayed in one of the researchers' specified locations[1] in the last 12 months had not used a youth or adult shelter. "Young people's previous experiences in institutional settings, as well as the strong bonds that they forge on the street in order to survive, can affect their willingness to enter shelters," said Lewis. "Long-time street youth who have never utilized shelters may be anxious about entering them for the first time."

Indeed, the study found that youth who had spent time in shelters (those in the shelter sample) generally had positive opinions about them. Nearly 87 percent said that shelters could "help kids like me figure out what to do with their lives." Only 11 percent of this group perceived shelters as dangerous, and only 7 percent saw them as too religious. About 37 percent, however, viewed shelters as too restrictive of their independence. This last statistic may be attributable in large measure to the lack of healthy structure experienced by youth who come from situations of abuse and neglect and/or who have lived on the street for some time. As a result, these young people may view as restrictive the interventions employed by shelter staff to assist them in resolving crucial issues.

The term "runaway" may be a misnomer.

Opinions were more mixed among youth in the street sample. A total of 61 percent said that shelters could "help kids like me figure out what to do with their lives." About 34 percent perceived shelters as dangerous, about 35 percent saw them as too restrictive of their independence, and about 20 percent saw them as too religious. Such views would be expected since the study found that more than half of the youth in the street sample had never spent time in a shelter.

Short-Term Health Care Available to Street Youth

Health care services, by contrast, did not appear to be underutilized by runaway, throwaway, and homeless young people. A total of 73 percent of youth in the street survey reported having a medical checkup within the past year. Half reported that they had a regular doctor or health care provider.

Still, 33 percent of the street sample said they had problems obtaining health care while away from home. And of those who reported having a regular provider, 35 percent said that the provider was a hospital emergency room. "These findings highlight the critical role played by programs such as shelter clinics, free youth clinics, and neighborhood health centers," said Lewis. "These services are filling a critical need for young people who are at high risk for serious health problems, yet we need to continue to explore options for ensuring that young people have access to long-term health care as well."

Research Team Recommends New Definitions, Expanded Services, and Additional Research

On the basis of the study's findings, several recommendations emerged for clarifying public perceptions about runaway, throwaway, and homeless youth and giving these young people greater access to critical services. The practices of most programs serving this population already

[1]Defined for purposes of the study as one of the following: A youth or adult shelter, a public place (a bus station, for example), an abandoned building, outside, with someone they did not know because they had no place to stay, or in a subway or other underground public place.

reflect several of these recommendations.

Public Education. The high proportion of sampled youth who reported throwaway experiences calls into question the terms used to describe this population. "Runaway and homeless youth professionals and advocates need to continue to educate communities about why young people are away from home," said Lewis. "As a first step, we might think about our definitions and clarify the situations that result in young people being away from home."

Substance Abuse Prevention and Treatment. The interactions found between familial substance use, youth substance abuse, and youth suicide and other at-risk behaviors led researchers to recommend making prevention and treatment services more accessible to these youth populations and their families. To that end, they note that it is critical that organizations serving these young people ensure that they have access to prevention and treatment either directly or by referral. They also point out that in cases in which youth are reunited with their families, aftercare should include access to substance abuse counseling for both youth and families.

Outreach and Coordination. Given the proportion of youth in the street and household samples who had not used shelters, the research team recommended more aggressive and intensive outreach services to young people. They suggested that intensified outreach efforts might include strengthened ties between outreach workers and health service providers because of the large number of youth who reported coming into contact with health service providers while on the street. They also pointed to the development of additional services, such as day or drop-in programs, as a way to make shelters more accessible and attractive to young people. Finally, given the study's finding that a high proportion of young people on the street have attempted suicide, the researchers recommended adequate training of outreach staff on dealing with young people's suicidal feelings and behaviors.

The researchers recommended increasing the number of Transitional Living Programs.

Services for Pregnant Teens. The researchers noted that the rates of pregnancy and parenting found among the females sampled confirm the importance of access in shelters to prenatal care and to comprehensive services for young mothers and infants. "FYSB will continue to promote enhanced connections to services for pregnant or parenting girls through linkages between shelters and other community-based agencies," said Lewis.

Greater Access to Transitional Living Program (TLP) Services. Given the association found between familial substance use and behaviors that place youth at risk, the researchers noted that it is critical for family situations to be carefully evaluated before attempts at family reunification are made. In FYSB-funded shelters, staff work with youth and their families to find suitable long-term placements in cases in which reunification is not appropriate.

The researchers recognize the potential of TLP programs as one such placement option. TLP programs offer young people the skills they need to live independently while maintaining contact, as appropriate, with their families. They recommend, therefore, that consideration be given to increasing both the number of TLPs (currently 77 nationwide) and to extending the 18-month limit on services provided through this program.

Additional Research. The shelter sample represents the first nationally representative survey of substance abuse and at-risk behaviors among youth in shelters, and the street sample is one of the first multicity surveys of street youth. As a result, the study team recommends further analysis of its data, including research on the following:

- The relationships between familial substance use, youth substance abuse, and youth suicide and other at-risk behaviors
- Factors that lead to involvement of runaway, throwaway, and homeless youth in delinquent behavior
- Family dynamics that precipitate runaway behavior or result in youth being thrown away or becoming homeless

To explore such issues, FYSB is considering next steps for further examination of these and other data related to runaway, throwaway, and homeless youth.

Study Findings Will Assist FYSB in Policy and Program Planning

As FYSB has done during 20 years of funding programs for youth, the Bureau will continue to explore ways to enhance its services to young people on the basis of new research findings. Ongoing research efforts allow FYSB to adapt its Runaway and Homeless Youth Service System to effectively respond to the changing needs and circumstances of young people.

The study's portrait of the problematic family environments that are associated with young people running away, being thrown away, or becoming homeless supports FYSB's efforts to promote prevention services for at-risk families. For young people recently on the street, FYSB will continue to promote early intervention services to protect them from high-risk behaviors and environments.

The study confirms the need for a continuum of services to assist runaway, throwaway, and homeless youth and their families.

In addition, the rates of shelter utilization by youth imply that the potential barriers to young people's use of shelters need to be analyzed. FYSB's Program Performance Standards, based on the legislative intent of the Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Act of 1974 (JJDPA) (P.L. 93-415), require shelters to notify parents when their children arrive at shelters. Under the Standards, programs also must try to reunite young people with their families and limit youth shelter stays to 2 weeks. These regulations may make shelters less attractive to youth who have left abusive family situations or who may need assistance for more than 2 weeks. As the study's findings showed, increasing young people's utilization of shelter services is critical because of the dangerous circumstances they face on the street.

The findings regarding the effects of abusive family situations or familial substance use on young people may indicate that further examination of the family reunification process is needed. Family reunification decisions, and strategies for adequately supporting youth and their families during the reunification process, appear to be critical to ensuring the well-being of young people. One program option that may offer such support is the home-based services model, in which youth service professionals bring services into the homes of at-risk families. Home-based services projects tested through FYSB's Research and Demonstration Program have shown promise as a means of helping families resolve issues that otherwise might result in young people leaving home or being asked to leave.

The study also confirms the critical need for a continuum of services to assist runaway,

throwaway, and homeless youth and their families. Family preservation and support services, such as mediation and family counseling, can assist families at risk while young people are still in the home. Outreach and early intervention services can bring youth who have just left home into safe environments before they fall victim to the high-risk circumstances on the street. Drop-in programs can allow young people who have been on the street for some time to access substance abuse and mental health services and shelter care. "We need to ensure that communities can offer a continuum of services that meets the varied needs of youth and families and allows young people to receive the developmental support necessary to overcome the substantial barriers they face in successfully transitioning to adulthood," said Lewis.

For information on how to obtain either the Executive Summary or the full three-volume report of ***Youth With Runaway, Throwaway, and Homeless Experiences: Prevalence, Drug Use, and Other At-Risk Behaviors***, contact the National Clearinghouse on Families & Youth.

About the National Clearinghouse on Families & Youth

The National Clearinghouse on Families & Youth (NCFY) prepared this summary to encourage wider dissemination of information about runaway, throwaway, and homeless youth issues. NCFY is part of a coordinated Federal response to the growing need to link youth service professionals, policymakers, and the general public in their efforts to help families and youth. The Family and Youth Services Bureau (FYSB) established NCFY to serve as a central information collection and dissemination resource. NCFY offers the following services:

- A professionally staffed information line, available to callers with questions about effective programs, current activities, helpful publications, or referrals
- State-of-the-art databases containing literature and information on FYSB programs
- Free or low-cost publications, information packets on FYSB programs, materials that inform the field about new developments, and reports on topics of interest to youth services professionals, policymakers, and the general public
- Issue Forums designed to bring together experts in the field to explore critical issues and develop strategies for improving services to families and youth
- Targeted special mailings announcing FYSB funding availability, new NCFY publications, and other issues of interest

For more information about NCFY services and activities, call or write:

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